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Being Cruel to be Kind

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“It’s a surprise,” my granddad said clearly expressing that he didn’t want anyone to tell us what was happening in the coming minutes. The air around us was heavy with heat, which was unusual for such an early hour in the morning. We were in South Africa but even at 6 a.m. in the morning, it wasn’t normal to feel your skin stick to the leather seats of the jeep.

A burst of strong wind blew in through the windows catching my attention, as I looked up I saw a helicopter just about to land right next to us. As the helicopter blades slowed to a stop, I noticed the name “Save The Rhino” plastered across the clothing of what looked to be superheroes emerging from the swirling dust, walking towards us like they’d just saved all of humanity from some catastrophic event. This is when I realized what was happening.

The place, to which my granddad had brought us at an ungodly hour in the morning, was actually a rhino sanctuary. I was visiting a rhino sanctuary! My heart was thumping in my chest so hard I thought everyone around me could hear it. The anticipation was palpable as we left the jeep and neared the entrance to the sanctuary.

It turned out that we were being permitted to witness a very important moment, the dehorning of a rhino by qualified veterinarians and we were led to the place where a soundly sleeping member of odd-toed ungulate from the family Rhinocerotidae lay before me.

Now, if like me you had no idea that rhinos were being dehorned regularly let me explain why this has become necessary. Rhinos are being hunted by poachers to the brink of extinction. Faced by this fact some hard choices have had to be made by conservation groups. Quite simply the poachers are killing the rhino to get the horn, so the removal of that iconic feature of the rhinoceros increases its chance of survival.

This dehorning was being carried out under the auspices of Save the Rhino, a big organization

based in Africa and Asia that supports many rhino conservation programmes to help conserve all five-rhino species. There are four main aspects that this organization focuses on, protecting rhinos, reducing illegal horn trade, involving communities and bringing experts together. All these aspects contribute to the way this organization has been making some inroads into saving these innocent creatures and preventing extinction.

Save the Rhino has grown in the space of less than twenty years from being a small charity with £300,000 a year, to now bringing in more than £2,000,000 a year and they continue to grow. They have programmes in six African and two Asian countries and are fundraising all over the world.

The Save the Rhino organization believe they have what it takes to stop habitat loss and can increase the number of rhinos so that in twenty years, rhinos will no longer be critically endangered as they currently are.

Through generous donations, Save the Rhino have gained a lot of money and with that money the charity makes sure that every last penny gets put to use such as over £2,000,000 spent on anti-poaching and monitoring, captive breeding, veterinary and environmental education in countries like Kenya and Zambia.

As I admired this innocent, beautiful animal, I recalled that this creature had done nothing wrong to deserve being hunted to extinction. The rangers got ready to slice off the horn, so that hopefully it could live peacefully in the wild without any interruptions. “Cutting off the horn is like cutting your fingernails,” one of the veterinarians reassured the audience as we watched on silently.

And then, it was all over, just like that. Once the horn was passed around and shown to everyone, the rangers continued with waking the beast up. As the rhino rose onto his feet, he fumbled around a bit, struggling to come to his senses. As

soon as he regained power over his body he immediately dashed for the outside world, not looking back, with clearly no desire to ever come back.

But unfortunately for him to live a long life, he must be brought every year or so to shave down the horn once again. In that moment I felt sad and angry as I thought to myself, about how animals that are doing no harm to us go through life in fear. This is not how wild animals should live but they do because of human behaviour. That is why it should be our responsibility to fix it and that is why Save the Rhino is such a great charity because it is saving all 5 species of rhino, one step at a time.